

DOES SEX-ED IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVMENT? HB 456

Do you know why public schools began teaching sex-education? Lagging student achievement.

In the mid-1960s, scientific research concluded that lagging student achievement was occurring because students were unable to find relevance between public school curriculum and their life. So educators theorized that adding subjects like sex-education, driver education, career education—and other soft curricula—would offer the relevancy needed to improve student achievement.^[1]

In 2005 Mexico lost more jobs to China than the U.S. did.^[2] The reason I point this out, is that the economic race Americans & Montanans are competing in is global. It isn't personal. It isn't a conspiracy. It's the 21st century. A company can hire a blue collar laborer in some developing nations for under \$5.00 a day and thereby raise that family to middle class status. That's good. Nations with a strong middle class are far less likely to go to war or riot.

\$5.00 a day is an annual income of about \$1,200-\$1,500 per year. The cost of living for these nations' is a fraction of the cost to live in the U.S. and that gives them the competitive edge over blue collar and unskilled labor. If Montanans are to compete globally, we must either reduce our cost of living to compete with those nations or we must deliver 21st century goods & services of a caliber that justifies our current cost of living standard.

Let's put global economics in its proper perspective. America's proportionate share of the 6.8 billion world population is less than 5%. China accounts for nearly 20% and India is accounts for 17% of our world population.^[3] China and India value education highly.

Since the mid-1960s, achievement in America has plummeted. For 50 years student achievement has declined. Among top technologically advanced nations, American 15-year olds now rank in the bottom third in science literacy. In mathematics 23 of 29 nations outperform U.S. students!^[4] Nations of high student achievers have had a longer school day and a longer school year than Montana for decades. So every minute of every hour at Helena Public Schools counts.

50 years is more than enough time to demonstrate that sex education and other soft curricula do not provide the relevancy needed to improve student achievement. The 700% increase in prison incarceration since the 1970s is one more indicator that too many Americans are failing to get an education that will yield a job with a cost of living wage.^[5]

Educating our youth is an issue of economic security, both individually and nationally. If you want civil peace in America, teach our children how to get a 21st century job that will pay the rent. Children depend upon a public school curriculum that will enable them to receive a 21st century education so they can compete in a global job market.

Since the mid-1960s, sex-education has been driving wedges between parents and educators just like the controversy Helena finds itself embroiled in. Parents feel increasingly disenfranchised from their children's education. They don't feel their voice matters. It does.

Scientific research has found that student achievement is most likely to improve when parents actively participate in their children's schools.^[1] Educators need to stop driving wedges and start building a community of lifelong learners. Parents need to take back their schools by actively attending school board meetings and helping their elected school officials establish 21st century priorities in public education.

I urge parents and teachers to help the school board of trustees focus the education of Helena youth on core disciplines: Math, Sciences, Reading, Writing, Engineering, Technology. Suspend the soft-curricula—at least until Helena youth can compete internationally.

1) *Beyond the Classroom: Why School Reform Has Failed & What Parents Need to Do* By Laurence Steinberg Ph.D with B. Bradford Brown, Ph.D.; and Sanford M. Dornbusch, Ph.D. Copyright 1996 by Laurence Steinberg. Published by Touchstone, a trademark of Simon E Schuster, NY.

2) *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the 21st Century, Release 2.0*. Thomas L. Friedman, 2005, 2006, Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, New York, NY, pp 340 and pp 137.

3) *Countries and Areas Ranked by Population: 2009*, U.S. Census, International Database (IDB), www.census.gov.

4) *U.S. Performance Across International Assessments of Student Achievement: Special Supplement to The Condition of Education 2009*, Provasnik & Gonzales, NCES & David Miller, American Institutes for Research, August 18, 2009, NCES 2009083, accessed 9/28/2010 at www.nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009083.

5) *Public Safety, Public Spending: Forecasting America's Prison Population 2007-2011*, a first-of-its-kind study compiled by the Pew Charitable Trust in 2007, www.pewpublicsafety.org/statistics/prisoner_population.aspx.